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ABSTRACT

In 1987, a graduate-level program to train transition service specialists was instituted at California State University at Long Beach. The program, known as the Collaborative Transition Services Training Program (CTSTP), is an 18-semester unit program organized into three phases: a 3-unit course on transition programming for youth and adults with disabilities, a 12-unit core of interdisciplinary coursework, and a 3-unit practicum in applied settings. Trainees follow individualized competency-based participant training plans that are typically completed on a part-time basis over 3 successive semesters. The CTSTP has been evaluated by various means, including profile data of project participants, pre- and postprogram completion transition competency self-ratings by trainees, external review by independent investigators, and follow-up studies of program graduates' career outcomes/changes. Since 1987, 82 trainees from a broad mix of fields (special, vocational, and adult education) have participated in the program. According to the evaluation measures, the CTSTP has helped participants achieve positive career outcomes, improve their job performance, increase their degree of networking and involvement with other transition personnel, and expand services to additional client groups. The CTSTP has also been positively received by employers of its graduates. (Contains 20 references.) (MN)

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# A Multi-year Evaluation of a Program in Transition Services

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## ABSTRACT

### Transition Services Personnel Preparation: A Collaborative Program

This article describes the evolution of an interdisciplinary graduate program for preparing transition services specialists. The rationale for the program is presented, along with a description of its basic design. Primary attention is devoted to the multiple measures used to evaluate the program and outcomes obtained from the evaluation. The article concludes with program observations directed to personnel who conduct similar training programs.

Over the past 10 years, national attention has been increasingly focused on the difficulties faced by youth with disabilities as they transition from school to employment and adult life. With the presence of transition services provisions in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (PL 101-476) and a similar emphasis in related federal program areas of vocational education (PL 101-392), rehabilitation services (PL 102-569) and job training (PL 102-376), we should expect to see significant improvements in the education, employment, and living options of persons with disabilities. Indeed, Rusch, Syzmanski, and Chadsey-Rusch (1992) suggested that there is "a beginning of a groundswell of optimism among selected students and their families, educators, and policy makers (p. 6)" with respect to recent transition policy and practices taking place in America.

Although important improvements in the area of transition services continue to occur, much work still needs to be done. For example, there are nearly a million employed professionals in special education, vocational education, and rehabilitation working for state, federal, and private agencies in this country who play a critical role in implementing the transition services initiative mandated by PL 101-476 and related legislation. The vast majority of them have limited or no expertise in

planning and providing comprehensive transition programs for youth with disabilities (Syzmanski, Hanley-Maxwell, & Asselin, 1990). Whereas an emphasis on collaborative training between these professional groups has been advocated for well over a decade (e.g., Clark & Evans, 1977), the need for expanding preservice training programs in transition services remains great. To illustrate, research studies and reviews have indicated that: (1) vocational educators are in need of more information, training and assistance in responding to the vocational needs of persons with disabilities (Asselin & Finch, 1988; U.S. Department of Education 1992a), (2) special education teachers need more training and involvement in transition service delivery (Wehman, Moon, Everson, Wood, & Barcus, 1988; Okolo, 1988; Neubert & Moon, 1993), and (3) rehabilitation services personnel are in need of additional training and involvement in transitional programming for students with disabilities (Asselin, Hanley-Maxwell, & Syzmanski, 1992). Asselin et al. (1992, p. 265) further add that, "It is imperative that these personnel receive preparation based on a transdisciplinary model that develops cooperation, collaboration, and general understanding of specific roles and services."

Several inovative projects and programs are currently operating in California which promote collaboration between professionals and

improved post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (e.g., Project Workability, Transition Partnership Project, California School to Work Interagency Partnership Project). Yet, the need for collaborative personnel training for persons implementing these projects remains great, as indicated in a number of state agency publications (California Department of Education 1987; 1989; Albright & Greene, 1993). Moreover, California is a state in which there is a critical shortage of credentialled special education teachers (Ad Hoc Committe of Special Education Personnel Availability, 1990). According to a 1993 report by the California Department of Education, the number of special education teachers in California on emergency waivers has grown dramatically from 1985-1986 (582 waiver requests) to 1992-1993 (3,394 waiver requests) . Considering these factors, the Ad Hoc Committee argued that California is a state which ranks second nationally in terms of the need for adequately trained special education teachers and this is further supported in the personnel needs data presented in the 14th Annual Report to Congress (U.S. Department of Education, 1992b).

In response to these personnel training needs both nationally and in California, a transition services training program was begun at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) in 1987. The purpose of this article

is to describe the evolution of the program, including the multiple procedures used over time to evaluate the quality of training provided to participants and specific outcomes they have achieved since completing the program. Accomplishments and lessons learned from the program after seven years of implementation will be shared.

## CSULB Collaborative Transition Services Training Program

In recognition of the personnel shortages and needs cited previously, and the relative newness and implications of the transition services intitiatives in recently enacted federal legislation in special education (PL 101-476) and related federal program areas (e.g., vocational education, rehabilitation services), the CSULB Collaborative Transition Services Training Program was begun in 1987. This program began as one of thirteen originally funded Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) personnel preparation training grants (Baker & Geiger, 1988) and received additional OSERS funding in 1991.

The purpose of the CSULB Collaborative Transition Services Training Program is to recruit and train personnel from special education, vocational education, and adult services to become transition specialists. The training consists of an 18 semester unit program in three phases. Phase I of the program is a three unit course on transition programming

for youth and adults with disabilities. This course examines (1) the history and legislation of the transition services initiative, (2) state level transition policy and practice, (3) agency awareness and interagency collaboration, (4) phases of the transition process, (5) transition planning, and (6) transition follow-up activities and data gathering techniques. Observation of exemplary local projects and presentations from local personnel is integrated into course activities. Phase II consists of a 12 unit core of interdisciplinary coursework. The particular sequence of courses is organized in terms of matching program objectives with prior experience, training, and professional direction of each trainee. For example, trainees with an emergency special education credential take required coursework toward completion of the credential and thus become fully qualified as a special education teacher. Trainees from vocational education or vocational rehabilitation backgrounds usually pursue coursework toward completion of a master's degree and become fully qualified in their respective fields. An example of various course

sequences by training group is shown in Table 1. Phase III of the program provides each trainee with a 3 unit practicum experience in applied settings. A focal point of this community-based experience is the collaborative planning and delivery of transition services for youth with disabilities.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Before starting the program, trainees meet individually with the project coordinator in order to develop an individualized participant training plan. This plan contains four elements: (1) a statement of competencies to be attained, (2) a listing of courses and practica to be used for developing these competencies, (3) a schedule for program review sessions between tranee and project coordinator, and (4) a timeline for program completion.

While each trainee's program is individually designed, a set of generic competencies is to be attained by all trainees. These competencies are shown in Table 2. A description of the format for delivering the competencies and the evaluation measures used in each of the program phases is also displayed in this table.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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The three phases of the program are typically completed by trainees on a part time basis over three successive semesters (e.g., two 3 unit courses per semester for a total of 18 units). Since most trainees are employed full time while pursuing their coursework, all classes are taught in the evening hours to accomodate their work schedules. As the trainee nears the end of his/her program, the project coordinator holds an exit interview for three interelated purposes: (1) to review the trainee's performance, (2) to discuss the trainee's experience in the program and obtain input on program strengths and weaknesses, and (3) to discuss procedures to be used in conducting a post-program review of trainee activities and accomplishments.

## Program Outcome Data

A variety of program evaluation activities have taken place over the years in which the CSULB Collaborative Transition Services Training Program has been in operation. These include (1) profile data of project participants, (2) pre-post program completion transition competency self ratings by trainees, (3) external review of the program by independent

investigators, and (4) follow-up studies of career outcomes/changes achieved by graduates of the program. A review of each of these evaluation activities follows.

**Profile of Program Participants**

As noted in the literature reviewed in the introduction; effective collaboration between special education, vocational education, and adult services personnel is a critical component to the provision of quality transition services for youth with disabilities. Hence, a key objective of the CSULB program is the recruitment and participation of representatives from these three targeted training groups. Profile data on trainees who have participated in the training program since its inception in 1987 is shown in Table 3.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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A total of 82 trainees have participated in the program over the past six years. Representation from the three targeted training groups (e.g., special education, vocational education, and adult services) has been achieved, with the majority of trainees coming from special education (n=38, 46%), followed by vocational education (n=20, 24%), and adult

services (n=13, 16%). Eleven trainees (13%) from groups other than these participated in the program (e.g., full time graduate students, non special education or vocational education majors). Of the 82 total trainees in the program, 16 (19%) of them were members of minority groups.

Profile data show that the program has been able to recruit a variety of personnel from different transition service agencies who must work collaboratively together to provide transition services to youth with disabilities. As the program has evolved over the past seven years, however, greater recruitment emphasis was placed on special education personnel as opposed to the other targeted groups (e.g., vocational educators and adult service providers) because of the shortage and need for special education teachers in California. Likewise, the shortage of minority teachers that exists in the State has lead to a greater emphasis in recruitment of these individuals in the past 3 years. For example, of the 16 minority participants during the years 1987-1993, 13 or 81% of these were recruited in the last 3 years. This represents a 26% minority participation rate in the program for the period 1991-1993 as opposed to 9% minority participation rate during 1987-1989. Hence, the program has been successful lately in recruiting participants who can fill the shortages that exist in California. Continued emphasis on the recruitment

of special education teachers and minorities is occurring for this reason.

## Transition Competencies Achieved by Trainees

A second key objective of the CSULB Collaborative Transition Services Training Program is to make trainees more competent at providing transition services for youth with disabilities. An initial review of transition literature (e.g., Rusch & DeStefano, 1989; Wehman, 1990, and Phelps & Wermuth, 1992) by the training program staff led to the identification of thirteen competencies seen as being critical for transition services personnel to master (see Table 2). In addition to program staff input, these competencies have been periodically reviewed and verified by members of the program's community advisory committee, made up of personnel from various transition service agencies in the region (e.g., representatives from special education and vocational education, adult services, and vocational rehabilitation).

At the beginning and at or near the end of their training program, all participants are asked to rate themselves, utilizing a 4 point Likert type scale (1 = very incompetent, 4 = very competent), on each of the 13 program competencies. These pre- and post-ratings are subsequently compared to examine the extent to which significant change in perceived

competency to deliver quality transition services has occurred in trainees as a result of participating in the program.

A two tailed t test for dependent means was conducted, utilizing the pre-post competency ratings of 50 trainees who had participated in the program during the years 1987-1991. The pre-program rating means of all 50 subjects for competencies one through thirteen were compared with the post-program means for the same items. Test results demonstrated highly significant positive gains across all thirteen competencies; the mean t test value obtained for all tests run was 9.02 (mean p = .000). Test results for several competencies were particularly high in comparison to others. Specifically, competency 5 (e.g., describing the components and steps for building collaborative relationships, t= 12.04), competency 1 (e.g., understanding theoretical models of transition, t= 10.81), and competency 6 (e.g., describing the roles and activities in developing and implementing Individual Transition Plans, t= 10.05) were the three highest areas in which trainees felt they had achieved significant growth as a result of their participation in the program. The collective findings demonstrate that the training program leads to a significant increase in perceived competency of trainees to meet a variety of transition needs in youth with disabilities.

## External Program Review

An external program review was conducted by independent evaluators during the second year of the program's operation (Hulbert & Osborn, 1989). Interviews with program participants, their employers, faculty, and program staff took place. A summary of this investigation follows.

The first area investigated by the external review team was the strengths and weakness of the training program. Program participants interviewed by the evaluators most often mentioned as program strengths the three phases of the program, the opportunity to network with other transition personnel, the theoretical knowledge gained in the various course offerings, and the opportunity to apply the learning provided in the program during the practicum experience. The program weakness most often cited to investigators was the lack of ability for participants to stay together as a group in classes taken during Phase II, resulting in a decrease in opportunity to continue networking with other transition services personnel. A second program weakness mentioned by a number of respondents was the difficulty they experienced trying to develop a manageable sized project during their practicum.

Positive career and job related outcomes that occurred for program

participants as a result of the training they had received was the second area investigated by evaluators. Positive outcomes mentioned by participants included (1) change of transition related employment, (2) new plans for career advancement, (3) increased confidence on the job, (4) greater job related knowledge and skill, (5) broader job responsibilities, (6) more professional activity, (7) greater interaction with community resource personnel, (8) serving different populations of clients, (9) greater credibility with coworkers and other transition personnel, and (10) striving for higher leadership positions within the organization.

Employers were asked to cite positive changes which had occurred in employees who had completed the training program. The three most common changes noted were that the employee was (1) more effective or better at his/her job, (2) had increased confidence to develop new programs and assume a leadership role at work, and (3) was continually broadening his/her horizons as a result of participation in the training program. The vast majority of the employers interviewed were knowledgeable about the existence of the training program and indicated they would recommend it to others.

## Follow-up Studies of Career Outcomes/Changes Obtained by Program Graduates

Career outcomes and changes achieved by program graduates were determined via two follow-up studies (Jones, 1989; Dabney, 1993). Surveys assessing this information were mailed to a randomly selected sample of individuals who had been in the program during the years 1987-1991. The purpose of the mail survey, in contrast to the external review of the program, was to measure more long term changes (e.g., more than one year) in the careers of program graduates as a result of the training they had received. Surveys were mailed to 32 participants and 26 were returned, which represents an 81% return rate. A summary of the results of these surveys is shown in Table 4.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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The three professional development activities that increased the most in survey respondents were (1) reading professional journals, (2) conducting preservice/inservice training, and (3) attending professional conferences and workshops on transition related topics. Writing grant proposals was the fourth highest ranked professional development

activity that increased in respondents as a result of participating in the training program. Finally, a number of respondents stated that they had pursued additional training/degree programs or authored articles on transiton related topics. These collective results indicate that the training program fostered an interest and desire for continued professional development in many participants. Furthermore, the knowledge gained from the program was being transmitted to others in the field via staff development activities conducted by almost half of the program's graduates. In this way, the program can be seen as functioning as a "trainer of trainers" model, producing more transition specialists in the field.

A second outcome measured by the survey instrument was the degree of networking and involvement with other transition personnel that occurred in trainees as a result of participation in the program. According to the data shown in Table 4, more than half of the respondents noted increased communication with other transition professionals. Increased participation in professional groups or associations was also a common outcome in program graduates, with many of them joining a national professional organization (e.g., the American Vocational Association). In addition, approximately one third of survey respondents had served on

various transition advisory committees in their local region.

Finally, Table 4 shows the percentages of individuals who experienced transition services career changes and the specific type of changes that took place as a direct result of participation in the training program. Seven respondents obtained a new position within their current organization and two obtained new positions in a different organization. The type of job changes within the current organization that most typically occurred involved job restructuring, a new title, or an administrative promotion. Increases in salary also were noted by several respondents, with the average amount equal to $4,400 per year. Hence, approximately one out of every three program participants experienced some sort of job change within the field of transition services as a result of being in the program and, in some instances, this lead to a sizeable increase in salary, job title, or change in job responsibilities.

## Accomplishments and Lessons Learned

The results collectively suggest that the CSULB program has been (1) responsive to personnel training needs in the transition services domain, (2) helpful in advancing the careers of its participants and (3) positively received by employers of program graduates. There are, however, areas in need of improvement. These include a need to establish

a clearer and closer relationship among the three program phases in order to expand opportunities for professional dialogue and networking among program participants and the need to provide more guidance and assistance to participants during the practicum phase of their program. Efforts to help ensure continuity among the program phases seems to be an ongoing area of program work.

Although the program is relatively young, much has been accomplished to help it become established as an integral part of the graduate school curriculum at CSULB. Three developments illustrate this movement. First, all courses within the three program phases are now university approved and offered on a regularly scheduled basis. For example, the introductory transition services course taught in Phase 1 of the program was initially offered only as a special section course when the program first began in 1987. It is now available to all graduate students in the university. Second, the 18-unit program is now recognized as a specialization area in the master's degree programs in vocational and special education. Third, core program faculty are in tenure-track positions and play key leadership roles within their respective departments. To illustrate, the coordinator of the transition services training program also serves as the coordinator of the teaching credential

program in special education. The director of the transition services training program is also the coordinator of the graduate program in vocational education.

From the experience of operating this program over the past seven years, some additional observations are offered. The mix of participants from multiple agencies (e.g., special education, vocational education, rehabilitation services) is vital to a program of this nature. Through this mix, a deeper understanding and appreciation of intra- and inter-agency work is facilitated, and professional dialogue and networking are also broadened to span the multiple and diverse areas involved in transition service delivery. The opportunity for participants to individualize their training program is helpful in that each trainee is able to obtain knowledge and information that is most appropriately applicable to their particular profession and career as a transtion specialist. Finally, the practicum component of the training program is quite valuable because it allows participants to translate theory into practice, thereby increasing the validity of the knowledge gained in university coursework.

As we continue into the 1990's to implement the IDEA, the need for adequately trained transition services personnel will continue. It is hoped that what has been learned in the past seven years from the CSULB

Collaborative Transition Services Training Program will be helpful to others interested in providing quality training to future transition specialists.

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**Table 1: Example Course Sequence by Training Group**

| Program for Special Educators | Program for Vocational Educators | Program for Adult Service Personnel |
|---|---|---|
| | **Program Phase I (3 units)** | |
| *OCST 508 Transition Services for Youth and Adults with Disabilities (Greene, Albright) Examination of various models for and approaches to providing services to persons with disabilities in transition from school to work. | *OCST 508 Transition Services for Youth and Adults with Disabilities (Greene, Albright) Examination of various models for and approaches to providing services to persons with disabilities in transition from school to work. | *OCST 508 Transition Services for Youth and Adults with Disabilities (Greene, Albright) Examination of various models for and approaches to providing services to persons with disabilities in transition from school to work. |
| | **Program Phase II (12 units)** | |
| **Ed P 566 Career Planning for the Exceptional Individual (Kokaska) Review of the career, leisure time, adult, family & community needs & problems of the exceptional individual. Emphasis will be upon the cooperative role of the school, public & private community agencies and organizations including parent groups & associations comprised of exceptional individuals.<br><br>Ed P 564 Assessment of Individuals with Exceptionalities (Faculty) Knowledge of formal and informal assessment instruments and techniques used to assess individuals with exceptionalities from preschool to adult. Emphasis on use of accurate assessment data in the individualized educational planning process for students with exceptionalities.<br><br>Ed P 579 A Instructional Strategies for Individuals with Learning Handicaps (Faculty) Development and implementation of effective instruction for individuals with learning disabilities. Demonstration and application of clinical strategies with students with learning handicaps. Twenty hours of field work required. | Ed P 535 Counseling and Guidance of Exceptional Individuals (Greene) Educational & Vocational needs of exceptional individuals, methods of counseling, rehabilitation and guidance programs.<br><br>OCST 501 Foundations of Occupational Education (Albright) Education & training programs covering the spectrum of occupational education & human resource delivery systems. Review of federal policies, with implications for local programs. | Ed P 535 Counseling and Guidance of Exceptional Individuals (Greene) Educational & Vocational needs of exceptional individuals, methods of counseling, rehabilitation and guidance programs.<br><br>OCST 460 Occupational Education for Special Needs Learners (Albright) Identification & instructional development strategies for disabled & disadvantaged students in occupational education and employment settings. |
| Ed P 350 Education of Exceptional Individuals (Faculty) Survey of the education of exceptional individuals offering the opportunity for the study of, and exposure to, all exceptional individuals, including the communication-handicapped, physically handicapped, learning handicapped, severly handicapped and the gifted. Field work. | OCST 503 Management of Occupational Education Programs (Faculty) Advanced principles and procedures of management emphasizing local and county operations, and evaluation of occupational education programs.<br><br>OCST 504 The Environments of Occupational Education (Faculty) Interrelationships among occupational education, business, industry, government and society. | Ed P 529 Assessment in Career Counseling (Faculty) The selection, administration, scoring, and interpretation of assessment instruments in career counseling. Assessment areas include interests, values, personal characteristics, and aptitudes and abilities. Techniques for developing and using special assessment instruments will also be covered.<br><br>OCST 422 Grants and Contract Writing in Occupational Education (Faculty) Study of process of contract and grant proposal writing for public and private-funding agencies, including budget preparation, for occupational education. |
| | **Program Phase III (4 units)** | |
| OCST 480 Internship in Occupational Education (Greene) Structured learning experience in vocational or employment settings in which skills in developing and implementing instruction are applied. | OCST 480 Internship in Occupational Education, (Greene) Structured learning experience in vocational or employment settings in which skills in developing and implementing instruction are applied. | OCST 480 Internship in Occupational Education (Greene) Structured learning experience in vocational or employment settings in which skills in developing and implementing instruction are applied. |

*OCST stands for courses offered throught the Occupational Studies Department, College of Health and Human Services.

**ED P represents Educational Psychology and Administration Department in the College of Education. Special education and guidance programs are part of this department.

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**Table 2: Participant Competencies, Delivery Format, and Evaluation Measures by Program Phases**

| Competencies | Delivery Format | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|
| **Phase I**<br>1. Understand the theoretical models of transition for persons with disabilities.<br>2. Demonstrate knowledge of the different characteristics of various populations of individuals with disabilities and their unique transition services needs.<br>3. Understand the various domains to consider in the transition planning process, including self-determination.<br>4. Demonstrate knowledge of the various transition services delivery systems and resources for person with disabilities at the secondary and adult services level.<br>5. Describe the components and steps for building collaborative relationships between various transition services agencies and personnel.<br>6. Describe personnel roles and activities in developing and implementing Individual Transition Plans for student with disabilities.<br>7. Demonstrate ability to develop ongoing inservice personnel training programs for transition related personnel.<br>8. Demonstrate knowledge of how to critically analyze and evaluate transition services programs and outcomes provided to a person with a disability in order to improve the transition process. | All trainees take 3 unit course OCST 508: Transition Services for Youth and Adults with Disabilities | **Course Measures:**<br>-course examinations<br>-student presentations<br>-observation reports<br>-topical paper<br>**Project Measures:**<br>-periodic student review sessions with coordinator |
| **Phase II**<br>• Competencies 3,4,6,7 (see Phase 1)<br>9. Demonstrate appropriate instructional strategies for integrating students with disabilties into school, vocational, and community based instructional settings.<br>10. Demonstrate knowledge of various assessment procedures and instruments for determing transition domain specific knowledge, interest, aptitue and ability in persons with disabilities.<br>11. Identify the various counseling and guidance services available for individuals with disabilities, their parents, and their advocates at the secondary and adult services level. | 12 units of interdisciplinary coursework, individually determined with project staff input and review | **Course Measures**<br>-course examination<br>-student presentation<br>-student paper<br>-observation reports<br>**Project Measures:**<br>periodic student review sessions with coordinator |
| **Phase III**<br>• Competencies 3,4,5,6,8 (see Phase 1)<br>12. Demonstrate ability to develop, implement, and evaluate mini transition services grant proposal.<br>13. Demonstrate skills in working with various transition service agency personnel in the planning and delivery of transition services to a person with a disability. | 4 units of coursework in applied education and/or community settings | **Course & Project Measures:**<br>-on site observation<br>-training site performance evaluation<br>-student paper<br>-periodic student review session with coordinator |

**Table 3: Profile of Program Participants 1987-1993**

| Targeted Group | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Special Educators | 38 | 46% |
| Vocational Educators | 20 | 24% |
| Adult Service Providers | 13 | 16% |
| Others | 11 | 13% |
| Total: | 82 | 99% |

**Table 4: Results of Mail Survey**

| Professional Development Activity | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Reading Professional Journals | 12 | 46% |
| 2. Conducting Preservice/Inservice Training | 11 | 42% |
| 3. Attending Professional Conferences and Workshops | 9 | 35% |
| 4. Writing Grant Proposals | 8 | 31% |
| 5. Subscribing to Professional Journals | 7 | 27% |
| 6. Pursued Additional Training/Degree Program | 5 | 19% |
| 7. Authored Articles | | |
| **Professional Networking Activities** | | |
| 1. Increased Communication with other Professionals | 14 | 54% |
| 2. Increased Participation in Professional Group/Organization | 12 | 46% |
| 3. Served on Advisory Committee | 9 | 35% |
| **Transition Services Career Changes** | | |
| 1. New Position Within Current Organization | 7 | 27% |
| Type of Change: Job Restructuring | 2 | 29% |
| New Title | 1 | 14% |
| Administrative | 1 | 14% |
| 2. Salary Increase | 5 | 19% |
| 3. New Position Within Another Organization | 2 | 8% |

n = 26